THE JIB CRANE

AT an hour that seemed immediately after sunrise there was a kind of volcanic upheaval in the cot alongside my bed and a high voice piped out vigorously:

"Hello, Daddy is this today?"

"No," I muttered drowsily, "it's last night. Go to sleep, you young beggar."

But the young beggar climbed relentlessly upon my bed, sat upon my chest Napoleonically and continued:

"What day is this, Daddy? Is this Saturday? Are you going to the office?"

It was Saturday. I was not going to the office. I was contemplating a restful day at home. He knew all that, and without giving me time to equivocate he demanded, "Well, will you make me a crane?"

"A crane?" said I. "How do you mean—a crane?"

Only too well I knew how he meant. I recalled a day at the sea side when my young hopeful saw a boy with a toy crane lifting buckets of sand on to a gangway which the fishermen had a fancy to use for getting at their boats and where none but he desired sand. The boy was such an abvious nuisance to the men that the sight of him inspired my son to an instant demand for such a toy as that crane. In a large paternal way I had replied to his eager request:

"You wait until we get home, old chap, and I'll make you a crane, a better crane than that."

I meant it at the time—I did really. I saw, at that moment, exactly how I could construct the crane with cotton-reels for pulleys, you know, and an effective, but simply designed winch, made out of—oh, any old thing. I had felt that I could not continually refuse the child everything he wanted, having already rejected his plea for a live donkey and a motor-car to take home with us.

So now, in bed, when I feebly parried with "How do you mean?" my son promptly explained how he meant.

"Like you said at the seaside, Daddy, an' a boy was liftin' luggids when the boatmen tried to walk on that little wooden road an'——'

As if a man wanted to be reminded of what he had said at the seaside!

There was no escape, however. We rose and dressed. I found that the construction of that crane was not to be a leisurely artistic job. I was expected to make it now, before breakfast. No, the boy did not want to eat his porridge—all he wanted was that Daddy should make his crane. Similarly he did not want Daddy to waste any precious time on eating. He was good humored, but terribly firm about that until Daddy became terribly firm without being at all good-humored. Then the child wept grievously, whereupon threats were uttered that unless he instantly became a good boy, I would certainly not make him a crane. He became good, became almost angelic, with disconcerting promptitude, thus automatically putting me on my honor to construct that piece of machinery as soon as breakfast was over.

Really the boy's "goodness" gave me a rather uncomfortable feeling; for now that the job was actually confronting me I was seized with a horrible doubt whether I could make a crane after all. In my youth I used to mess about with a hammer and a few nails and knock together a rabbit-hutch or something of that kind, but I was never a real handy man, and here I was going to expose my incapacity to my confidently expectant son.

After breakfast I filled my pipe and leaned back in my chair beside the table, which drew from my employer the protest:

"Don't smoke your pipe, Daddy; make me a crane."

I rose with a sigh and we adjourned to the garden where, behind the tool shed, I knew there was a pile of wood, some of which might reasonably be expected to prove useful as raw material for my—or, rather, the boy's—purpose. I picked out a narrow board, and sitting on the garden seat, I gazed at it, trying to see in it the embryo of a crane. But I could not.

The boy watched me with the critical coldness of a police magistrate; his gaze pierced to my guilty soul.y

"Don't sit on the seat, Daddy," he urged; "make my crane."

"Be quiet," I snapped, "or else I don't."

He gazed at me for about ten seconds, and inquired:

"Are you thinkin', Daddy?"

"Trying to," I grunted.

"Don't think, Daddy,' he mildly suggested; "make my crane."

I drew out a bit of paper and a pencil and began to sketch something that an imaginative and sympathetic person might mistake for a crane. The youth regarded my doings wtih obvious suspicion.

"What are you writin', Daddy?" he inquired. "Don't write: just make me a crane."

"I'm drawing a crane. Can't you see?" I asked irritably.

"But I don't want a crane drawed," he responded; "I want a real crane to lift luggids, like you said at the seaside, an'——"

"Look here, young man," I sternly declared, "you just go and play seaside on the sand-heap. How can I make a crane with you dancing all over me?"

With feverish haste I rummaged in the wood-pile and found a six-foot lath an inch wide, half an inch or so thick. Out of the tool-house I disinterred a two-foot rule and a very rusty saw. I sawed the lath into two pieces, with the unavoidable help of the boy, who came and stood just where the end of the saw would catch him, trod on my toes at moments of crisis, and put out a helping hand with an unexpected sudden dart which nearly cost him a finger.

When he realized that I was fairly embarked upon the job a subtle change came over his manner. He ran about the garden, picking up silly oddments of stick and thrusting them upon me with such remarks as "Will this do for your crane, Daddy?" or "Here's a splendid stick for your crane, Daddy."

The position has altered. Daddy was spending the day at home just to make himself a toy crane, and his devoted little son was humoring the old man in this eccentric pastime. Not until, after four hours of strenuous labor, an actual crane emerged, capable, in skilled hands, of lifting three or four pounds weight, did he relax his attitude of patronizing consultativeness. It was really a jib crane, much to the astonishment of the manufacturer, and, if it showed a strong tendency to jib when least expected, still, it would lift "luggids."

For quite half an hour, with the maker in close attendance, that marvelous bit of mechanism was the pride of a gratified youngster's heart.

That was several days ago.

Now it stands forlornly perched upon two boxes near the back door. Milkmen, bakers and errand lads who call upon us are amazed at its ingenuity. They stand and gaze at it in their employers' time, with admiring awe. It is still intact, and its owner would weep outrageously if anything happened to it.

Bt nothing ever does happen to it. In splendid isolation it thrusts its three-foot jib in air. Its hook—the making of which, from a stiff bit of wire, gave me a blistered thumb—hangs seductively over its pulley, but never catches anything, not even a glance of the boy's blue eye.

On the sand-heap at the other end of the garden the boy sits banging an empty biscuit tin with a penny wooden spade. He is quite happy in the music thus evoked. The idea that he could be the relentless taskmaster who dragged me from my bed and made me spend a rare day of leisure in the hard toil of inventing and making the jib crane is inconceivable.—Punch.

APROPOS the food conservation program, here's what happened in Portland, a short time ago. An exclusive club, comprising the most prominent personages in the town, was staging its annual jinks. It was one of those Hurrah-for-Hoover affairs, and it was Hoover this, and Hoover that, all evening long. Finally the hilarity died down and the proceedings came to a close as the guests arose from the tables and solemnly sang the following conservation pledge to the strains of "Oh, Promise Me":

"We promise thee, that one day in the week
A wheatless, Hoover dinner we will eat,
And use of beef and pork and mutton stew
But once a day, and those days very few;
And in our coffee and our daily tea
We'll use of sugar very sparingly,
But eat more fish and fruit and vegetables.
We promise thee—we promise thee."